

Narrative Birch Creek Fire



Rocky Mountain IMT2, Team B
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AK-UYD-000506

August 12 to 23, 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Birch Creek FIRE

AK-UYD-000506

The Birch Creek Fire was located in East Interior Field Office, five miles southeast of Circle Hot Springs, AK. The fire was reported on July 3, 2013. The fire spread rapidly on August 8 and was approximately 10,961 acres by evening. A local ICT3 managed the fire prior to the IMT2 arrival. The Rocky Mountain IMT2 (Team B, Dan Dallas, IC) was ordered during the early morning of August 10. Mobilization occurred on the morning and throughout the day of August 10 and into August 11. We received a Delegation of Authority from Lenore Heppler, BLM Eastern Interior Field Office Manager, Marsha Henderson, State of Alaska and Steve Theisen, BLM-AFS Upper Yukon Zone FMO. The Delegation became effective at 2200 hours on August 12. The strategic objective was point protection due to the potential for large fire growth and the proximity to values at risk which included structures and private properties. Management of the Birch Creek Fire was returned to the delegating agencies on August 23, 2013 at 0600 hours with 46% containment. Total area involved was 24,923acres.

A WFDSS decision was published on August 8.

- 2. Provide protection to the Circle Hot Springs area, the community of Central, and other identified values along the Steese Highway.
 - No structures, improvements, allotments, or commercial timber was damaged as a result of the Birch Creek Fire.
- 3. <u>Disseminate information to the media, public, and other agencies in coordination with the Alaska Fire Service information officer.</u>
 - Two community meetings were held at the Circle District Museum, with a total attendance of approximately 35 community members.
 - Fire updates with clear, accurate and timely information were developed and distributed daily to the public, media, and Joint Information Center through personnel conversation, fact sheets, InciWeb, Twitter, and Facebook.
- 4. Collect structure information in the provided format and deliver the information to the Agency Administrator's representative, Marsha Henderson, at close-out.
 - Engine crews updated a 2002 structure protection plan for the affected areas, including the communities of Circle Hot Springs and Central.
 - 120 addition structures were added to the 2002 plan.
 - Structure locations and their associated hazard rating were plotted on GIS maps.
 - The Team will provide one hard copy to the agency administrator during the closeout. Additionally, an electronic copy of all products will be included in the incident documentation package and a "thumb drive" with the GIS data will be provided to the agency GIS technician.
- 5. The Heavy Equipment Policy for Wildland Fire Suppression for the Department of Natural Resources will be followed on state land.
 - The WFDSS (Incident Requirement List, 8/8/2013) states, "Heavy equipment is authorized on state lands."
 - The incident resource advisor was present at all planning meetings to ensure resource issues were identified and adequately mitigated.
 - The resource advisor worked daily with operational resources to ensure that all onthe-ground activities were consistent with resource protection goals.
 - The Team utilized a tracked machine (Juggernaut) to flatten tussocks as part of the indirect line construction. This was not only part of the suppression/holding tactical plan, but also reduced the significant hazard associated with foot travel up and down the line.
- 6. Ensure the incident is managed in a safe and cost-effective manner.
 - The WFDSS, Section 1.1 Decision Summary, approved an estimated cost for the incident at \$3,200,000.
 - The final projected cost determined by the Team's finance section will be approximately \$2,421,953, well under the approved amount.
 - Cost efficiencies were realized through timely demobilization of excess resources; minimal use of aviation resources; and hiring of local individuals to provide support services (drivers, camp crew, etc).

providing a clearly defined process to address questions, discuss options, and resolve issues.

SAFETY

Challenges:

- The most significant challenge was maintaining a reasonable medical evacuation time to a trauma center in the case of a serious or life-threatening injury. Although the Circle Hot Springs area is not the most remote location for Alaskan firefighting, it would still entail a long response.
- Contaminated water made members of several crews sick. This occurred just as the team was arriving in Central. Crew members were all treated by on-scene medical personnel. The facts, as best the team could determine, were forwarded to the local agencies via email. Water samples from the cubies were sent to the lab for analysis.
- A binder with a list of protocols, supplies, an explanation of kits, and pertinent information (such as form policy medical direction would like to have followed) would be very helpful to have for MEDLs not familiar with the Fire Medic Program.

Successes:

- The decision to use an indirect attack to meet the intent of protecting the communities of Central and Circle Hot Springs was a sound decision. Even though the final burnout could not be implemented, this strategy met the agency direction and reduced the overall exposure to personnel compared to a direct attack on the western flank of the fire.
- The Alaska Fire Medic Program is one of the best wildfire medical programs. The supply cache at Fairbanks and the quick transport time of meds to the fire helped with the quick set up of the Medical Unit.

INFORMATION

Challenges:

- Limited access to reliable phone and internet service. This was resolved through coordination with the Alaska Fire Service (AFS) Joint Information Center (JIC) to make sure incident information was current on InciWeb and through social media.
- Limited trust from the community towards outside resources. This was resolved by utilizing a local resource as a Public Information Officer (PIO) in addition to the team PIO.

Successes:

- Improved communication plan for local residents in the event of a needed evacuation. This was accomplished by incorporating an existing phone tree into structure assessment binders and increasing the number of followers on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alaska Fire Service (AFS) Facebook page.
- Coordinated with the Alaska Fire Service (AFS) Joint Information Center (JIC) daily to ensure that incident information was current and updated through the various electronic media. This was in response to the limited access to phone and internet at the incident.

- In the AK in-brief include an orientation to the smokejumper para-cargo capabilities.
- Incident personnel completed several valuable projects in the local community while waiting for definitive moisture on the fire and/or opportunities to complete a firing operation. The additional community projects included:
 - Teaching S-212 to incident personnel
 - o Training the Circle Volunteer Fire Department on the use of their apparatus
 - o Completing fire mitigation at several recreation sites in the area
 - Providing firewood, through suppression rehabilitation, to the elders of the Circle Tribal Council
 - o Improvements to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Station in Central, AK
- Updated the structure protection plan books and will leave a digital copy with the agency administrator.

AIR OPERATIONS

Challenges:

- Adapting to air operations in Alaska with large distances, remote fuel, and competition for scare aerial resources.
- The first several days of limited communication with dispatch until phone lines could be established. Limited phone access made it difficult to stay in touch with our ATGS in Fairbanks.
- A helicopter arrived on the fire that had been procured on a State of Alaska contract but
 was not carded for interagency fire. We flew two federal firefighters on it for a recon
 before it was determined that the aircraft was not fire carded. The aircraft was released
 and a SAFECOM was submitted.

Successes:

- Locating the helibase on the taxiway at Circle Hot Springs airport along with the Incident Base camp made for easy coordination for operations.
- Having two local Alaskan HECMs who helped us understand Alaskan helicopter operations.
- Having a Helibase Manager and AFS fueler at the helibase made our operations more flexible.

FINANCE SECTION

Challenges:

• Additional time for the finance section inbriefing was needed to clarify Alaska specific procedures.

Successes:

- Allowing Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Fire Service and Alaska State personnel assigned to the fire to help with procedures.
- Opportunity to sign off three trainees in the finance section.

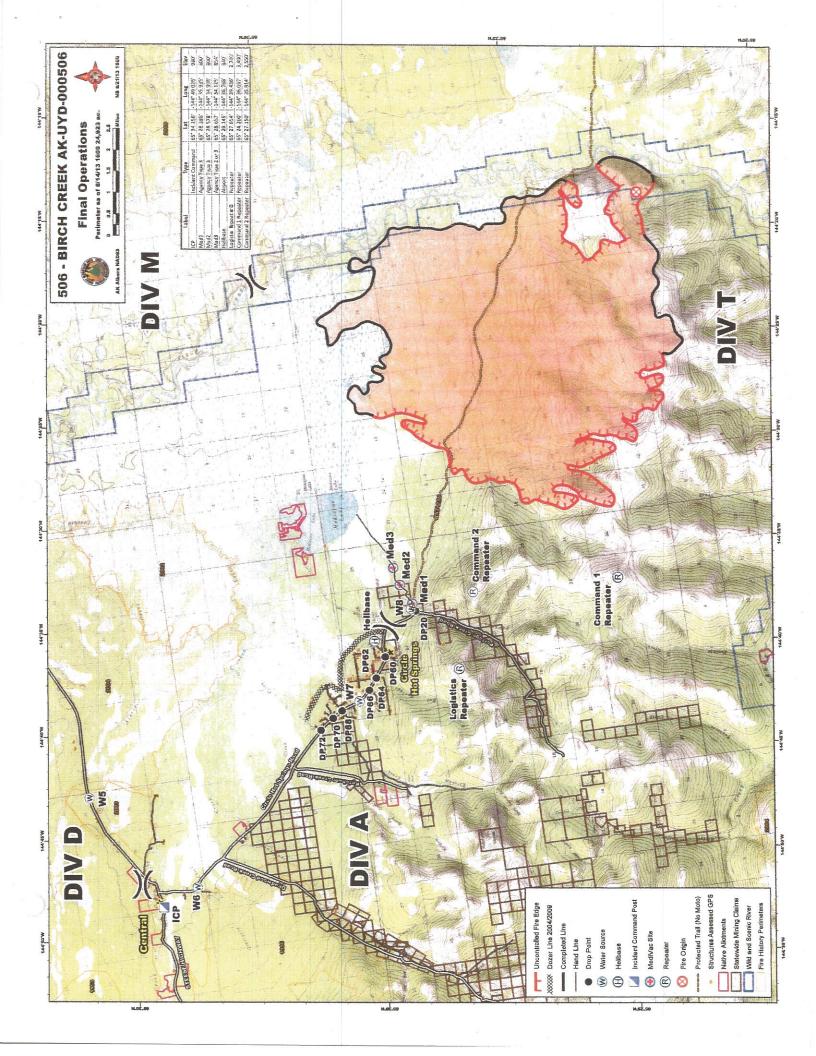
Appendices

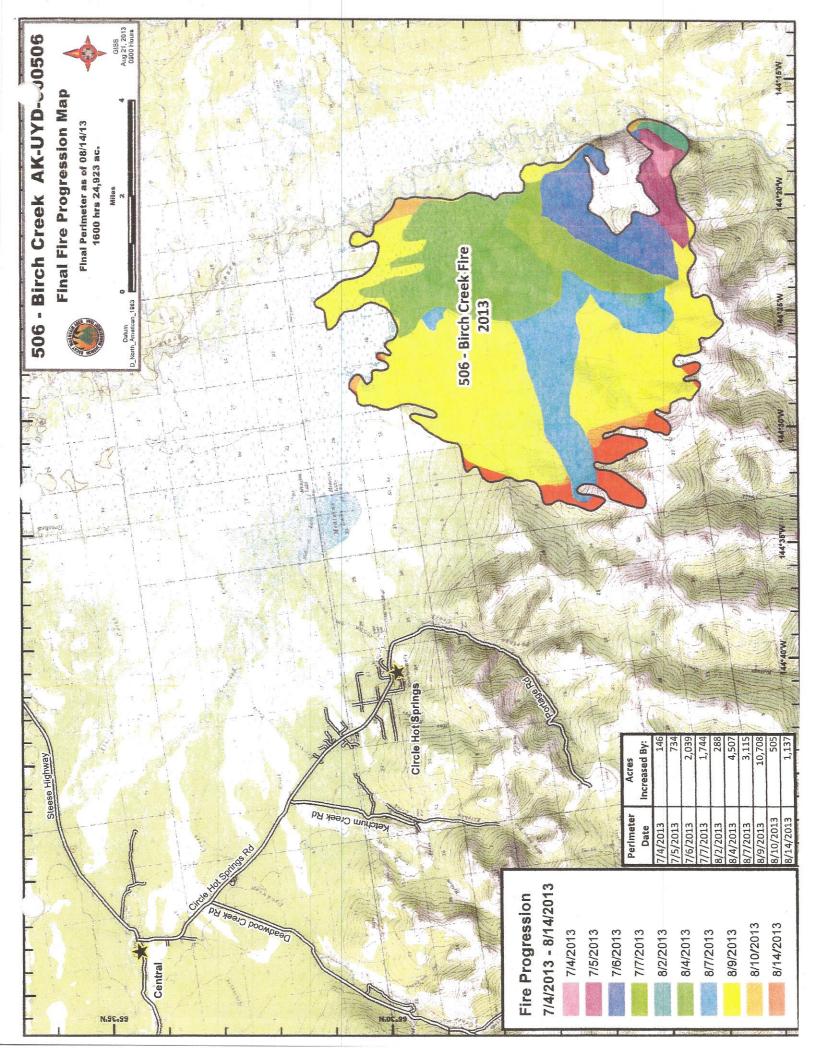
Fire Situation Summaries

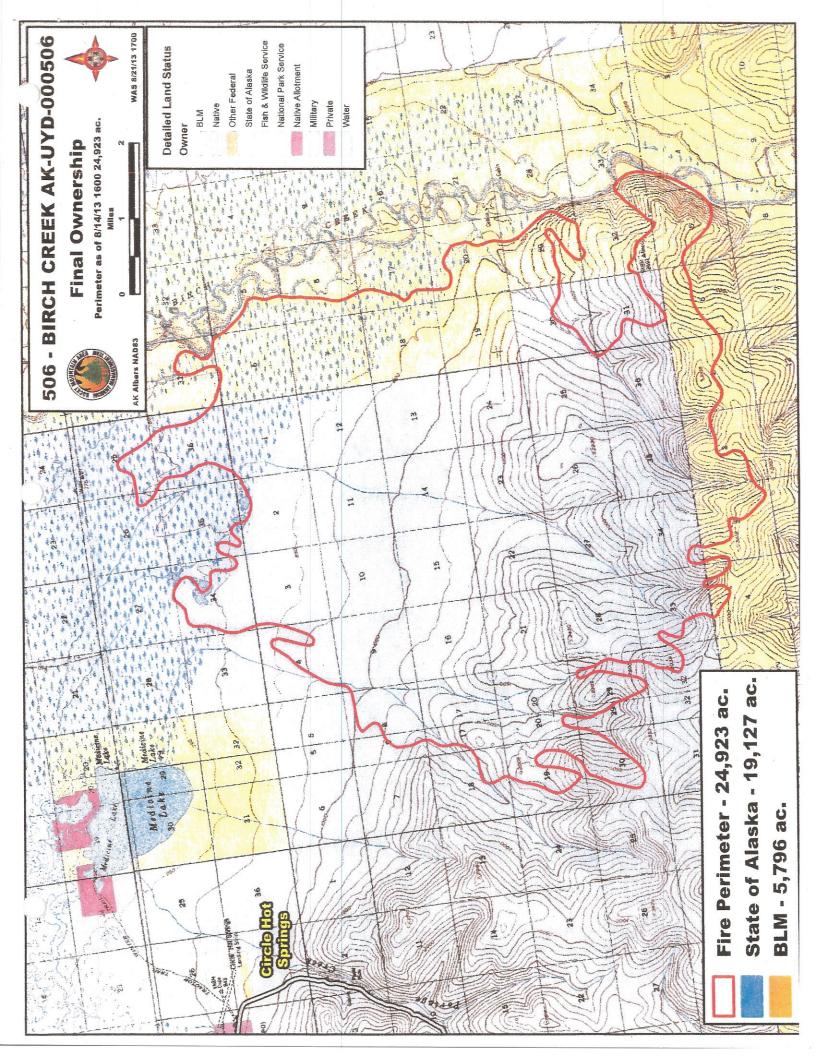
Final Perimeter Map Fire Progression Map Land Ownership Map

Cost Summaries

Final Cost Estimate Summary
Total Estimated Costs (pie chart)







Incident Weekly Cost Summary Rollup BIRCH CREEK FIRE (AK-UYD-000506)

I-Suite Cost Rollup
Printed 8/22/2013
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Estimated Costs 8/8/2013 - 8/23/2013

	Total
AIRTANKER	30,683
FIXED WING AIR	53,437
LIGHT HELI	40,720
Kind Group Subtotal	124,840
HANDCREW-TYPE 2	483,659
Kind Group Subtotal	483,659
ENGINES	58,275
Kind Group Subtotal	58,275
DIRECT PERSONNEL	215,440
Kind Group Subtotal	215,440
Direct/Indirect Subtotal	882,214
INDIRECT (IMT-CAMP)	537,934
INDIRECT (AFS)	226,020
Kind Group Subtotal	763,954
BUSSES	92,547
CAMP CREW	17,576
CATERER	23,176
FACILITIES	39,372
MOB/DEMOB	241,838
OTHER VEHICLES	136,137
SHOWERS	1,370
SUPPLIES	187,587
Kind Group Subtotal	739,603
LOWBOY-TRANSP.	1,200
OTHER EQUIPMENT	23,487
WATER TENDERS	11,495
Kind Group Subtotal	36,182
Direct/Indirect Subtotal	1,539,739
Total	2,421,953

BIRCH CREEK FIRE Final Estimated Costs 8/8/2013 – 8/23/2013 \$2,421,953

